

## *An Intellectually Coherent Curriculum*

*An intellectually coherent curriculum is one that is intentionally sequenced and provides regular opportunities for students to perform well at increasingly difficult tasks. The curriculum culminates with exit courses where senior year students practice the skills expected of entering college freshmen*

**I**n a school with an intellectually coherent curriculum, students enroll each year in a series of courses where content becomes progressively more challenging. Students are given fewer course options so that all students have the opportunity to learn the same content and experience the same progressive challenges. Embedded within this content are key thinking and reasoning skills taught across all grade levels and courses. In each course, students know how they will be judged. They know the quality of the work expected and have seen an example of the final product. In a 9th grade new student orientation they and their parents may have been given examples of typical writing assignments and other academic work from each of the four years of high school to show the differences in increasing expectations for each grade.

Over the four years of high school, students are also expected to gradually work more independently on larger, more complex pieces of work. They are expected to sustain their attention over longer periods of time with more simultaneous assignments within each course. This is similar to what they will encounter in a college course. One strategy to achieve this lofty goal is to offer Senior Seminars or Paired Courses developed with local college faculty to prepare students for college success. (See <http://cepr.uoregon.edu> for related projects)

## *Developing an Intellectually Coherent Curriculum\**

Use the steps listed below to develop an intellectually coherent curriculum across four years of high school.

- ⇒ Examine current practices in relation to external standards—like the Knowledge and Skills for University Success
- ⇒ Design a program to prepare all students for postsecondary success
- ⇒ Develop a vision of what a well-educated student will look like after four years
- ⇒ Make sure departments meet and clearly identify outcomes and materials that will be covered in a series of courses
- ⇒ Engage in cross-disciplinary discussions on what skills the students should gain over the four years
- ⇒ Include discussion of this intellectual journey with incoming students, particularly new ninth-graders
- ⇒ Share examples with parents and students of the work that will be expected and rubrics that will be used to judge student work
- ⇒ Assist students to find the best path—developmentally appropriate but heading for intellectual growth.
- ⇒ Consciously design assignments that address habits of mind (ways of knowing) needed for success in higher education—analysis, critical thinking, reasoning & argumentation, intellectual openness.

\*Adapted from chapter 6 in: Conley, David T. (2005). *College Knowledge: What It Really Takes for Students to Succeed and What We Can Do to Get Them Ready*. San Francisco, CA : Jossey-Bass.